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ABSTRACT

Formal mentorships should help new and aspiring administrators, yet there is little evidence about what works and what does not work in such programs. The study summarized in this paper explores demographic, relational, and operational characteristics of mentor dyads in both formal programs and informal pairings of aspiring and practicing administrators with more experienced administrators. Using multiple data collection methods (data comparisons, demographics analysis, and structured interviews), two populations were studied--40 pairs of practicing and prospective administrators participating in a statewide formal mentorship program and a stratified random sample of administrators pursuing naturally evolving mentoring relationships. Characteristics of formal and informal mentorships were found to be similar to mentorships in other occupations, though relational characteristics were the controlling factors in establishing a successful mentorship dyad. Traits of trust, mutual respect, openness, commitment, and friendship were reported as the most critical relational factors. Most dyads in both populations stressed professional aspects of their relationship over personal aspects. Where choice of partner existed, formal mentorships were rated as more successful than formal arrangements without choice. Informal mentorships, built on choice from the beginning, were rated more highly than the formal mentorships. Clearly, formal mentorships can benefit both mentors and proteges. Six aspects of successful formal programs are recommended. Six tables present survey data. (11 references) (MLH)

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FORMAL AND INFORMAL MENTORSHIPS FOR ASPIRING AND PRACTICING ADMINISTRATORS

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FORMAL AND INFORMAL MENTORSHIPS FOR ASPIRING AND PRACTICING ADMINISTRATORS

Introduction

The theme of this year's AERA conference is "Implications for Practice." One practice area that has received considerable notice and study in the last few years is that of mentorships for aspiring and practicing administrators. Many school districts and universities are experimenting with formal mentor programs; yet, as often happens, our experimentation is ahead of our documented understanding of what factors make a successful mentorship, what things we should watch out for to prevent unsuccessful ones, and when (and where) mentorship may not be the answer to our problems (Barnett, 1985; Drury, 1988; Playko & Daresh, 1988). In particular, until recent years, there has been little research on mentorships for public school administrators.

Public school administrators in most states complete a university-based certification program to be certified as a school administrator. University-based programs are one form of occupational learning. Occupational learning can be categorized into three areas: (1) formal education (such as university course work), (2) apprenticeship, and (3) "learning-while-doing" or learning from experience. Apprenticeships, generally used today in the trades, have been an accepted method of learning a new job since medieval times. Bolton (1980, p. 198) says, "Apprenticeship is the practical aspect of training that has as its purpose to assimilate all the knowledge and facts into a workable systematic collection of occupational competencies. School administration training usually has some combination of those three modes of learning. However, many practitioners report that they need more help to make a smoother transition into their administrative roles (Daresh, 1987; Peterson, 1985). Formal mentorship programs should help new and aspiring administrators, yet, there is little

evidence to date about what works and what does not work in mentorship programs for administrators.

Perhaps the most well-known study of mentorships is Levinson's 1978 study of 40 men between the ages of 35 and 45 from four occupational groups. Levinson, et al. found that one of the important aspects of those men's adult growth and development was a mentor. This mentor was usually older, male, and identified through some informal process. Since Levinson's study was published, more attention has been given to the mentoring concept, particularly for having women and underrepresented racial and ethnic people advance in their careers. Many districts have instituted formal programs aimed at assisting women and minority representatives in their administrative careers. Even though the results of those formally organized mentorship programs have mixed reviews as to their success, the literature suggests that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages (Klauss, 1981; Price, 1981; and Verts, 1985). Still, little had been studied about the effects of structure, gender, age or ethnicity on the degrees of success in formal and informal mentorship programs.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore demographic, relational, and operational characteristics of mentor dyads in both formal programs and informal pairings of aspiring and practicing administrators with more experienced administrators. We asked these questions:

1. Demographic Characteristics. What are the demographic characteristics of formal and informal mentorships? What are the personal characteristics of the mentor pair? Does size of the organization, organizational affiliation of mentor/protege, position of protege, age, gender, or race/ethnicity have a significant social influence on the perceived success of the mentorship?

2. Relational characteristics. What are the relational characteristics of formal and informal mentorships? What interpersonal interactions like

friendship, counseling, career help, etc., can be identified between the mentor and protege? What relational characteristics contribute to perceived success?

3. Operational Characteristics. What are the operational characteristics of formal and informal mentorships? What information does the pair share, and how is it shared? Where and how often does the pair meet? What specific administrative skills are modeled or taught within the mentor relationship? Which operational characteristics contribute to perceived success?

4. Interaction. What are the interactions between demographic, relational and operational characteristics in formal and informal mentorships? How do these interrelationships contribute to perceived success?

5. Implications for Practice. What implications do these findings have for improvement of administrator preparation, continued growth, and professional development?

Methodology

Two populations were studied. Starting in the 1986-87 school year, three statelevel professional organizations sponsored a formal mentorship program for aspiring school administrators. Each year twenty practicing administrators were appointed to act as mentors to twenty aspiring administrators. Between 1986 and the spring of 1988, there were a total of forty pairs who participated in this program. Those forty pairs were the population for the formal mentorship portion of this study.

The second population was of informal mentorships. Data were collected about naturally evolving mentorship relationships through the state public school administrators organization. A stratified random sample of a representative population of 417 administrators was developed and surveyed. Because women and minorities are underrepresented in administration, they were oversampled to ensure that they were represented in each subcategory. The sample was stratified by size and type of district.

Multiple data collection methods were used. Data were collected to allow comparison across formal and informal settings and across multiple pairs. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed through review of statewide demographics, through a questionnaire completed by mentors and proteges, and through selected structured interviews with mentors and proteges.

A survey questionnaire was used to collect demographic, relational, and operational characteristics of both formal and informal mentor pairs. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information about the respondent's gender, age, racial/ethnic group, previous and current administrative position or experience (if any), tenure in positions, size of district, salary, etc. Respondents were asked to rank twelve relational situations on a five point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (often). Open-ended questions were included to generate information about personal interactions, organizational activities, and patterns of the mentor relationships. The questionnaire was mailed to all (n=497) subjects with a response rate of 57 percent. Statistical analyses of quantitative data included frequencies, cross tabulations, and comparisons of means, standard deviations, etc.

Followup interviews with a stratified random sample of dyads were completed. Three mentor pairs were chosen from each cohort of the formal group and three pairs from the informal group (n=24). They were asked to comment on what contributed most to the success/lack of success in the mentor relationship. Interview data was transcribed and content analysis techniques were used to review responses for demographic, relational and operational characteristics, as well as for sequence responses and for interaction effects.

Results

Characteristics of formal and informal mentorships were found to be similar to mentorships in other occupations, although there was a pronounced focus on relational characteristics as being the controlling factors in the establishment of a successful mentorship dyad. Traits of trust, mutual respect, openness,

commitment and friendship were reported as the most critical relational factors in successful mentorships. With these traits, pairs could negotiate what worked best for each pair; without these traits, both mentors and proteges reported little positive effects. This can be seen for relationship interactions reported by proteges for the informal mentorship (Appendix A, Table 1) and for formal mentorships (Appendix A, Table 2). "Being at ease (with each other)", showing trust and confidence", "valuing my opinions", and helping with personal goals had the highest frequency and percent for both populations.

Formal mentorships were frequently described as not as intense as informal mentorships, but were described as positive if a sufficient level of relational traits were developed in the dyad. Aspirants and practicing administrators generally reported a positive relationship and positive experiences, with proteges reporting increased self-confidence as a direct result of the ability to discuss problems and issues with their mentors. Words most often used by proteges in the informal mentorship population to describe the roles played by mentors and other influential people are listed in Appendix A, Table 3. Words most often used by proteges in the formal mentorship population to describe the roles played by mentors are listed in Appendix A, Table 4. Both populations are similar, describing the mentor as "friend" and "role model".

Most dyads in both populations stressed professional aspects of their relationship over social aspects. Exposure to a variety of work situations and learning about political aspects of the job are important for aspirants and neophyte administrators. The more exposure to operational aspects the proteges have, the better able they are to handle new jobs. The types of activities found useful are listed in Appendix A, Table 5 (Informal Dyads) and Table 6 (Formal Dyads). Observing and talking with mentors about such activities as teacher evaluation, hiring staff and teachers, student discipline, and staff meetings help proteges understand administrative styles and outcomes of situations.

One of the most interesting findings concerned the differences in reported effectiveness where mentors and proteges were able to exercise some choice in

selecting their partner over pairings where no choice was extended. Where choice existed, formal mentorships were rated as more successful than formal mentorships where no selection choice was extended. Informal mentorships, built on choice from the beginning, were rated more highly by participants than the formal mentorships.

Demographic characteristics of age, gender, race/ethnicity, position, etc., appeared to have little effect on reported success in this study.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Even though they are constantly interacting with others, school administrators often feel more isolated that teachers. They are expected to be "in charge" or "lead" and seldom have a colleague with whom they feel totally comfortable sharing concerns and mistakes. This is particularly true for newly hired administrators.

The findings of this study indicate that a formal mentorship program can be beneficial to proteges aspiring to become administrators and for practicing administrators who are ready to share their knowledge and skills with others. Mentorships can be an important aspect of increasing transfer of theory into practice and increasing the likelihood of success for new administrators. Programs can also increase opportunities for under-represented groups but must be constructed in such a way that choices of pairs is easily possible. Relationships cannot be forced but opportunities can be provided for people to meet and talk is such a way that the likelihood of people seeking help when they need it is increased.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend six aspects of successful formal programs and dyads that increase the chance for success in a school district beginning a new program. First, establish a plan for the program and determine the overall purpose. If possible, separate completely from administrative evaluation. Second, develop goals and objectives, and set up loosely structured guidelines,. Let the mentor-protege dyad develop their own

activities and interactions. Third, identify mentors and proteges with as much opportunity for voluntary participation as possible. Fourth, conduct a shared orientation for all dyads where you review goals and objectives and structure some initial time for the days to become better acquainted with each other. Encourage each person to keep a private journal of the mentorship so they can review their own progress in the relationship. Fifth, provide resources for the program. This can be low budget, but should include at least some release time in the initial stages for the mentor and protege. Sixth, develop a feedback system that allows you to monitor the program. This system should not be aimed at evaluating the relationships, but on whether the program design is meeting your goals. In this study, these seem to be the critical elements for any successful program.

The study results raised many questions about how mentorships develop in the formative stages and about the best planned longevity of formal programs. While it was determined that a mentorship can take many forms, further research can be conducted on how the necessary elements of trust, mutual respect, commitment, and friendships can be woven into a formal program. We conclude that exchanging ideas, providing support and guidance, and reflecting on situations and decisions in a mentorship will help improve the skills and craft of administrators who will lead our schools into the twenty-first century.

TABLE 1. Mentor Influence or Relationship Interactions by Percentage of Often - COSA (n = 250)

Activity and interaction	No.	1 Never	2	3	4	5 Often
Frequency						
Percent						
Be at ease around me.	222	1	5	9	59	148
		.4	2.0	3.6	23.6	59.2
Enhance my self-confidence by showing trust and confidence in me.	224	2	5	8	64	145
		.8	2.0	3.2	25.6	58.0
Value my opinions.	222	1	4	20	77	120
		.4	1.6	8.0	30.8	48.0
Be willing to defend/ protect me in work related matters.	215	9	9	41	57	99
		3.6	3.6	16.4	22.8	39.6
Take interest in my family, hobbies, and personal interests.	222	14	21	41	59	87
		5.6	8.4	16.4	23.6	34.8
Be willing to use his/her available power and resources to help me with assigned tasks.	221	5	9	38	85	84
		2.0	3.6	15.2	34.0	33.6
Be comfortable with the two of us having an occasional dinner or going to other social event.	221	27	19	41	53	81
		10.8	7.6	16.4	21.2	32.4
Provide protection when I take risks.	215	14	21	48	62	70
		5.6	8.4	19.2	24.8	28.0
Help me make career moves that are appropriate for my level of competence.	220	20	25	44	80	51
		8.0	10.0	17.6	32.0	20.4
Engage in regular informal counseling with me.	222	19	30	72	56	45
		7.6	12.0	28.8	22.4	18.0
Help formulate strategies to reach personal career goals.	221	21	39	60	64	37
		8.4	15.6	24.0	25.6	14.8
Acquaint me with others who can help me reach my career goals.	220	23	48	55	59	35
		9.2	19.2	22.0	23.6	14.0

TABLE 2. Mentor Influence on Relationship Interactions by Percentage of Often - Formal Program (n = 26)

Activity and interaction Frequency Percent	No.	1 Never	2	3	4	5 Often
Be at ease around me.	25	2 7.7	0 0	1 3.8	4 15.4	18 69.2
Enhance my self-confidence by showing trust and confidence in me.	25	0 0	1 3.8	4 15.4	4 15.4	16 61.5
Help formulate strategies to reach personal career goals.	25	1 3.8	2 7.7	5 19.2	3 11.5	14 53.8
Acquaint me with others who can help me reach my career goals.	25	3 11.5	1 3.8	5 19.2	5 19.2	11 42.3
Value my opinions.	25	0 0	0 0	4 15.4	11 42.3	10 38.5
Be willing to use his/her available power and resources to help me with assigned tasks.	24	0 0	4 15.4	5 19.2	5 19.2	0 38.5
Be comfortable with the two of us having an occasional dinner or going to other social event.	24	5 19.2	0 0	5 19.2	5 19.2	9 34.6
Be willing to defend/ protect me in work related matters.	23	3 11.5	3 11.5	5 19.2	4 15.4	8 30.8
Take interest in my family, hobbies, and personal interests.	25	3 11.5	0 0	10 38.5	4 15.4	8 30.8
Provide protection when I take risks.	25	4 15.4	4 15.	7 26.9	4 15.4	6 23.1
Help me make career moves that are appropriate for my level of competence.	24	1 3.8	5 19.2	5 19.2	7 6.9	6 23.1
Engage in regular informal counseling with me.	25	0 0	3 11.5	7 26.9	8 30.8	7 26.9

TABLE 3. Roles Played by Individual Who Influenced Respondent's Career Development - COSA (n = 250)

Role	No. Responding	Percent	Gender* F/%	M/%
Friend	168	67.2	61/37.2	103/62.8
Role model	165	66.0	59/36.4	103/63.6
Mentor	118	47.2	49/42.2	67/57.8
Sponsor	79	31.6	36/47.4	40/52.6
Teacher	75	30.0	24/32.0	51/68.0
Guide	73	29.2	30/41.7	42/58.3
Coach	70	28.0	29/42.0	40/58.0
Counselor	59	23.6	26/44.1	33/55.9
Peer Pal	43	17.2	20/46.5	23/53.5
Other	37	14.8	0	0
Godfather	16	6.4	8/50.0	8/50.0

*Total percent equals more than 100 because respondents checked as many as applied. *Not all respondents indicated their gender.

TABLE 4. Roles Played by Individual Who Influenced Respondent's Career Development Formal Program (n = 26)

Role	No. Responding	Percent	Gender* F/%	M/%
Friend	17	65.4	15/88.2	2/11.8
Role model	17	65.4	15/88.2	2/11.8
Mentor	16	61.5	13/81.3	3/18.8
Sponsor	8	30.8	7/87.5	1/12.5
Teacher	8	30.8	6/75.0	2/25.0
Guide	10	38.5	9/90.0	1/10.0
Coach	11	42.3	9/81.8	2/18.2
Counselor	6	23.1	4/66.7	2/33.3
Peer Pal	6	23.1	4/66.7	2/33.3
Other	2	7.7	Not shown	
Godfather	0	0	Not shown	

Total percent equals more than 100 because respondents checked as many as applied. *Not all respondents indicated their gender.

TABLE 5. Mentor Help with Operational Activities Listed by Percentage of Useful - COSA
(n = 250)

Operation	No. Responding	Not Useful No.	%	Useful No.	%
Teacher evaluation	165	12	4.8	153	61.2
Hiring staff & teachers	159	12	4.8	147	58.8
Student discipline	149	15	6.0	134	53.6
Budget-building/dist	144	10	4.0	134	53.6
Administrative meetings	139	5	2.0	134	53.6
Communication w/parents	141	13	5.2	128	51.2
Opening/closing of school	129	11	4.4	118	47.2
Staff development	129	14	5.6	115	46.0
Staff meetings	132	18	7.2	114	45.6
Policy manuals	131	17	6.8	114	45.6
School board meetings	130	17	6.8	113	45.2
Curr development	119	15	6.0	104	41.6
Student rights	116	12	4.8	104	41.6
Student code conduct	119	18	7.2	101	40.4
School reports	118	19	7.6	99	39.6
Teacher rights	111	15	6.0	96	38.4
Building maintenance	104	19	7.6	85	34.0
Class scheduling	102	20	8.0	82	32.8
Student scheduling/ assignmts	97	18	7.2	79	31.6
Collective bargaining	93	14	5.6	79	31.6
Student activities	97	40	8.0	77	30.8
Personnel cont mgmt	95	19	7.6	76	30.4
Committee meetings	86	10	4.0	76	30.4
Ordering equipmt/supplies	91	16	6.4	75	30.0
Emergencies & emer drills	90	15	6.0	75	30.0
Safety regulations	84	13	5.2	71	28.4
Parent/teacher conferences	82	15	6.0	67	26.8
Graduation ceremonies	79	22	8.8	57	22.8
Curr handbook	77	20	8.0	57	22.8
Special ed regulations	73	16	6.4	57	22.8
Custodial services	78	22	8.8	56	22.4
Student transportation	71	19	7.6	52	20.8
PTA/Booster meetings	74	23	9.2	51	20.4
Accreditation of school	73	24	9.6	49	19.6
Clerical operations	69	24	9.6	45	18.0
Food services	62	28	11.2	34	13.6
Health services	56	22	8.8	34	13.6
Other	29	2	.8	27	10.8

TABLE 6. Mentor Help with Operational Activities Listed by Percentage of Useful Formal Program (n = 26)

Operation	No. Responding	Not Useful No.	%	Useful No.	%
Teacher evaluation	21	0	0	21	80.8
Student discipline	19	1	3.8	18	69.2
Staff meetings	19	2	7.7	17	65.4
Hiring staff & teachers	17	0	0	17	65.4
Staff development	17	1	3.8	16	61.5
Budget-building/dist	16	1	3.8	15	57.7
Administrative meetings	13	2	7.7	11	42.3
Communication w/parents	17	2	7.7	15	57.7
Opening/closing of school	8	1	3.8	7	26.9
Policy manuals	14	1	3.8	13	50.0
School board meetings	14	4	15.4	10	38.5
Curr development	15	0	0	15	57.7
Student code conduct	16	2	7.7	14	53.8
Personnel cont mgmt	15	1	3.8	14	53.8
School reports	13	0	0	13	50.0
Committee meetings	13	2	7.7	11	42.3
Student activities	13	4	15.4	9	34.6
Curr handbook	9	1	3.8	8	30.8
PTA/Booster meetings	11	4	15.4	7	26.9
Parent/teacher conferences	10	3	11.5	7	26.9
Student transportation	8	1	3.8	7	26.9
Student rights	9	3	11.5	6	23.1
Building maintenance	9	3	11.5	6	23.1
Clerical operations	8	2	7.7	6	23.1
Student scheduling/ assignmts	7	1	3.8	6	23.1
Teacher rights	8	3	11.5	5	19.2
Spec ed regulations	8	3	11.5	5	19.2
Ordering equipmt/supplies	7	2	7.7	5	19.2
Class scheduling	5	1	3.8	4	15.4
Collective bargaining	7	3	11.5	4	15.4
Safety regulations	7	3	11.5	4	15.4
Graduation ceremonies	6	3	11.5	4	15.4
Custodial services	7	3	11.5	4	15.4
Health services	6	3	11.5	3	11.5
Food services	7	5	19.2	2	7.7
Emergencies & emer drills	5	4	15.4	1	3.8
Accreditation of school	4	4	15.4	0	0
Other	0				

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